

VERSATILITY OF THE TAARAB LYRIC: LOCAL ASPECTS AND GLOBAL INFLUENCES

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'Taarab' is a popular music entertainment in East Africa whose origin is 'contentiously' given as Middle East. It is an art form imported to East Africa perhaps in the early years of the 1900s. Taarab has been variedly looked at, but has generally been seen as a uniform body. This essay sets out to show that from its inception in East Africa, taarab has never been uniform as it started to develop its own characteristics and peculiarities as a performing art. It has been undergoing a number of changes in its musical and lyrical structures. It moved outward to become a popular music instead of being court music, and from being coastal music to being a music that has spread out to inland Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Burundi, thus approximating musical structures of these regions as it is assuming new roles and functions. Although in our description we do in passing refer to the whole body of the art complex 'taarab', it is on the lyric that we focus on.

This article is written on the basis of findings from field work and library research that have been conducted from 2000 to date in a project entitled *Local and Global Aspects of Taarab: A Popular Music Entertainment in East Africa*, under the umbrella topic "*Lokales Handeln in Afrika im Kontext globaler Einflüsse*", funded by Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG).

Introduction

Even in an extreme case of 'art for art's sake', literature invariably shows a correlation with its function(s). It partakes of Wellek & Warren's utility axiom that "[...] [t]he nature of an object follows from its use: it is what it does ... an artefact has the structure proper to the performance of its function, together with whatever accessories, time and materials may make it possible, and taste may think it desirable, to add [...]" (1973: 29). The examination of the structure of the taarab¹ lyric constantly metamorphosing, attests very well the claim that 'change' in art is often tickled by functional criterion. This is an attempt to affirm this claim by showing how various functions assigned to this music complex trigger change in its lyric, producing formal and thematic variation therein.

Theoretically, this essay sets out to deal with 'three' phenomena in relation to change. Firstly, machination of the lyrical structure: the inner mechanism of language system involving choice of *syntagms* (morpho-syntactic elements and processes) and *paradigms* (lexical and grammatical

¹ Taarab is a popular music entertainment imported from Middle East to the East African coast in the early years of the 1900s. From its inception here, it started to develop its own peculiarities as it underwent structural changes and moved outwardly to inland Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Burundi assuming new characteristics, roles and functions.

units), self-regulatory rules that bind discrete components to form wholes. Secondly, resources with which the art is made; the materiality: sounds, forms, tropes, images, figures, words, word groups and sentences considered not as empty vessels, but vessels impregnated with substance: ideas, themes, motifs, messages – all historical, social, cultural, political and psychological concomitants so to say. To this, we should add, mediated fluxes that have increasingly become more attainable as signs, images and labels or concepts of commodities – initially via print-media, phonograph record, sound film, radio, audio-cassette, video and now via public and satellite television and perhaps, computer internet and web-sites, expanding the range of available repertoire and tempting local artists to tap beyond immediate confines with the aim of (re)structuring taarab to suit new requirements. Thirdly, different purposes or functions – professional or amateurish – assigned to taarab at the level of individuals, groups and society or public domain, helping taarab and its lyric to find the ‘appropriate’ aesthetic and thematic expression and fulfilment of certain purpose(s).

Historical Remarks

The histories of taarab in Zanzibar and Lamu are (re)constructed and discussed variedly and contentiously. In Zanzibar, taarab’s inception is associated with particular ‘patronage’, where the royal and well to do families in Zanzibar Stone Town area, are said to have imported the music from Egypt. However, this ‘myth’ crumbles when one gets to know the fact that the earliest taarab in Zanzibar had its roots from Yemen or Arabian Peninsula. In fact the famous *Ikhwan Safah Club* whose taarab style is associated with Egyptian, is claimed to have been founded by Zanzibaris of Yemen origin.²

In Lamu the history of taarab’s inception is even more eclipsed. The poetry genius of Lamu, especially in the vein of *gungu* dance, the re-shaping of *ūd*³ (lute) into *kibangala* (a locally designed lute) and the re-moulding of taarab to suit Lamu cultural sensibility, is attributed by some scholars (e.g. Graebner 1999: 350-351 and 2003: 4-6) as portraying a high degree of local ingenuity and originality.⁴ Nonetheless, it takes a bit of ‘fancy’ to perceive that, if not Egypt, then the

² The interviews we made during our fieldwork between 2002 and 2003, affirm the historical validity of this statement. Also, Shaib Abeid’s untitled notes on his musical biography and the history of *Ikhwan Safah Club* in Zanzibar make this point clearer.

³ A very important instrument in the Middle East Taarab.

⁴ A highly speculative proposition that does not prove any connection between taarab and this poetry tradition or *gungu* performance. The fact that a certain instrument was re-designed from a foreign source and used in a thriving musical performance (*gungu*) does not necessarily make the result taarab. We would therefore, go with the Askew’s hypothesis (2000: 27) that ... “[t]he India Ocean trade network that economically sustained the region did not merely entail the exchange of commodities. Accompanying the trade in material goods was a concurrent trade in cultural practices. Sailors on trade *dhow*s from Arabia and India brought with them their musical traditions (including instruments - *my emphasis*) when visiting and sharing world-views with Africans whom they met at the ports in Lamu, Mombasa, Tanga, Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar.”

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Middle East ‘factor’ must be a source of inspiration to both Zanzibar and Lamu types of taarab, though stylistically various versions of taarab grew and took different directions thereafter.

Hard data for evidence of ‘pristine’ form of taarab in Lamu and Zanzibar is hard to find. The explanatory power of this essay therefore, relies on information gathered during our field work in Lamu, Mombasa, Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Zanzibar between 2000 and 2003 and from songs sung between 1920-1950 by Siti bint Saad’s group in a collection entitled *Waimbaji wa Juzi* (1966).

Taarab Lyric and Swahili Poetic Tradition

Swahili poetry whose history in written form goes back to 17th century, is definitely a precursor of the Swahili taarab lyric which came to exist later with the introduction of taarab in East Africa. It is therefore safe to assume that Swahili poetry, heavily influenced by Arabic prosody, has been formally a major source of influence for the taarab lyric which was from the outset, written in verses having equal number of lines, each showing equally measured syllabic metre(s), *caesuras* and rhythmic patterns with internal and end rhymes. Quite often in the past, verses of this lyric were written as *tristich*⁵ and *quatrain*⁶ with refrains – the structural basis from which we are set to show deviation(s).

Here is an example of a ‘tristich’:

Wingi mkuruba	huja kwa were <u>vu</u>
Wala matilaba	hupati kwa ngu <u>vu</u>
Ya ladha mahaba	kwa mtu mweke <u>vu</u>

Refrain/Chorus: Kwa mtu mwekevu

*Close intimacy comes with wisdom
What you crave for can't be attained by force
Love is full of taste to one who knows how to retain it*

Refrain/Chorus: *To one who knows how to retain it*

⁵ It is defined in Cuddon’s *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1991) as a group of three lines of verse or stanza of three lines, as in triplet (q. v.)

⁶ It is defined in the same dictionary as a stanza of four lines, rhymed or unrhymed.

And this is an example of a ‘quatrain’:

Alinidhani bandiya	ndani ya mikono ya <u>ke</u>
Akichoka nichezeya	anache nifedhehe <u>ke</u>
Nami sikufikiriya	kama nitarudi kwa <u>ke</u>
Sitorudi abadan(i)	niradhi niangamiye
Lakini leo karudi	kama jambo haliku <u>wa</u>
Na macho yake shahidi	uovuni yamvu <u>wa</u>
Kaja niomba nirudi	mapenzi kuyachuku <u>wa</u>
Kajaomba samahani	vipi nimkataliye?

*She took me to be a doll in her hands
Only to drop and humiliate me when she got bored
Never did I think I would return to her
Return to her I would not, I preferred death!*

*Today she's come back to me as if nothing has happened
Her innocent eyes bear witness to her surrender
She's come to implore me to take back her love
She's asked for forgiveness how can I refuse?*

Diversification of Taarab

Pointers from the material collected, allow us to surmise⁷ the fact that taarab has structurally, never been a uniform body, but a sum total of different styles that are classified under a complex category – taarab; each style showing some affinity and differences to another. This ‘interconnectedness’ is described by Topp (1992 & 2000) as a *continuum* with a certain elasticity⁸ such that any style is measured according to how near or distant from the ‘ideal’ (/ traditional) taarab it is. The gap between one style and another and between all the styles and the ‘ideal’(/ traditional) taarab, appears to exist on the basis of ‘style of vocalisation’, ‘instrumentation’, ‘method of playing the instruments’, ‘performer / audience divide’ and ‘reasons behind the detachment of a certain style / form.’

Almost from the outset, taarab assumed certain roles and served interests of different groups as it emerged out of narrow confines (i.e. of Sultan’s palace and Zanzibar Stone Town area or out of Muhammad Kijumwa’s and Bwana Zena’s spheres of influence in Lamu (Matola & Whiteley 1966: 64). Askew (1999: 76) affirms:

⁷ This is however, done with reasonable amount of induction from events we have lived to witness and information gathered during our field work and our involvement in taarab over years.

⁸ The continuum has two end-points. On the one end ‘ideal’ taarab is plotted as a measure of all other styles and on the other end, *kidumbak* is placed as a detached style from the ‘ideal’ one. In between there exists *taarab ya wa-nawake* (women taarab) which aspires for ‘ideal’ taarab but has certain affinity with *kidumbak*.

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Swahili communities place great value on musical performance as a form of cultural expression, and scholars place great value on it as a window onto social relations. An essential element in virtually every public and private celebration (weddings, female initiation ceremonies, male circumcision rituals, spirit possession cult activities, and political rallies), the centrality of music to Swahili social life is difficult to dispute. Yet beyond its role in the expression of self or group identity, musical performance constitutes of a forum for the public display of patterned differences: status, gender, class, religious devotion and ethnicity. Like the Greek dance-events described by Cowan (1990), it provides an arena as well as the mechanisms for struggles over prestige, reputation and position.

Thus, taarab has, in its spread, criss-crossed racial, ethnic and geographical boundaries, creating harmony as well as tension and rivalry between individuals, groups and nations. Hence, the spread of taarab at different conjectures, reveals its linkage, initially to pastime and later, to commercial praxis – always with inclination to voice interpersonal relationship (e.g. in love, romance, advice, reproach, censure, warning etc.) as well as negotiating socio-economic, cultural, political and gender-asserting positions, underlining a conceptual framework that “[...] [c]ulture arises in specific historical situations, serving particular socio-economic interests and carrying out important social functions.” (Durham & Kellner 2002: 33).

The Court Lyric

The version of taarab that was performed in Sultan’s palace as we have pointed out above, evolved out of ‘patronage’, perhaps similar (in entertainment and panegyric inclination) to the poetic patronage of the former Xhosa, Zulu, Mandigo, Yoruba and Hausa kingdoms of Southern and Western Africa (Finnegan 1976: 81-110). The performance constraints in this case being:

- the observance of loyalty and respect⁹ to the royal family and praise of its vested power and rule – a salient feature of the lyrical content.¹⁰
- the expected poetic excellence of the music of Arabic influence and lyric adorned with Arabism and prosodic ornamentation, predominantly used as a criterion for royal standard and taste.

⁹ For example Jahadhmy (1966: 3-4) observes when referring to the Mwalimu Shaaban as a singer of taarab both in the palace and outside it that ‘Shaaban sang his all as silence reigned among the audience, till Shaaban suspected his singing did not appeal to the royal audience – *why there was not any clapping or loud affirmation?* He was used to out-door performances, significant or minor ones, where when he pleased the audience he was loudly cheered and when not, he was booed.’ (My translation of: “Akaimba Shaaban kufa na kupona na huku kimya kimoja kwa wasikizi, hata Shaaban akashuku labda maimbaji hayakupendeza - *mbona hapana kofi wala heko yoyote?* Kazoea hafla ya nje, kubwa na ndogo ambako akifurahisha anahekewa asipofurahisha anazomewa.”)

¹⁰ Lyrics of this content are very few in the collection *Waimbaji wa Juzi*, for a simple reason that they were compiled during the post-revolution time and hence it would have been foolhardy to expose the composers’ loyalty to the royalty to an era in which anti-monarchy sentiments were predominant. Most of these lyrics – especially those which were unambiguous about the praise of aristocracy were not included and therefore lost or lie latently undiscovered somewhere in private archives.

- the performer / audience divide¹¹ in which the performers were from citizenry and the audience was the royal family and their guests.

It has often been alleged that to maintain the poetic excellence, during this time, songs were usually sung in Arabic (Suleiman 1969: 87 and Jahadhmy 1966: 4). This is only partially true – firstly, because Swahili was gradually becoming a vernacular and mother tongue of even the royal family (Abdulaziz 1979: 8) and secondly, most of the singers were either illiterate in Arabic or had a rudimentary knowledge of the language, hence could only memorise and reproduce the same songs with monotonous recurrence.¹² It is however, imaginable that the Swahili songs sung in the royal palace adhered strictly to prosody as part of poetic excellence, ornamentation and memory-enhancing device. Also Arabisms, borrowed motifs and imagery were utilised for witty and jesting moods and/or panegyric/romantic themes.

Love and romance have always been pre-eminent in taarab songs from the onset – but always multifarious, couched in oppositions as ‘desire’ versus ‘rejection’, ‘faithfulness’ versus ‘betrayal’, ‘life’ versus ‘death’, ‘beauty’ versus ‘grotesqueness’, ‘cheerfulness’ versus ‘lamentation’, ‘selfhood’ versus ‘otherness’, ‘egoism’/‘jealousy’ versus ‘dispossession’, ‘essentialist selfhood’ or ‘group identity’ versus ‘anti-essentialist selfhood’ or ‘group identity’ ... etc. All and more of these, are found in the anthology, *Waimbaji wa Juzi*. Suffices it here to give one ambivalent example, *Waridi* (The Rose), with its complex interplay of allied metaphors centred on beauty, desire and possession (76).

Waridi

I

La waridi uwa zuri la harufu
Wewe udi wewe asumini afu
Yamezidi mahaba kunikafu
 Kunikafu ...

La waridi shada jema la haiba
Maridadi dawa ya nafusi tiba
Jitahidi unitue kwa kwiba
 Kwa kwiba ...

¹¹ The performer/audience is clearly described in *Waimbaji wa Juzi* by Jahadhmy (1969: 88-89) when he says ‘When the time arrived, the Sultan, male members of his family, ministers and selected councillors they sat on the balcony and members of ‘Shuub’ taarab group sat in certain arrangement in the inner hall.’ (My translation of: “Wakati uli-powadia, Mfalme, aila yake ya kiume, mawaziri na wabarizi wake wa kuteuliwa wakakaa roshanini na tarabu ya Shuub wamejipanga ukumbi wa ndani.”)

¹² Referring to the taarab star Siti bint Saad, Suleiman (year: 88 & 89) observes that she was illiterate in Arabic and Roman scripts but possessed a wonderfully retentive mind and power of grasping things and mastering them was unimaginable. She could sing in Arabic with perfect intonation and the same in Hindustani ... Her favourite songs in Arabic were *Khaif*, which at the present time was sung by Ummu Kulthum of Egypt, *Wahayatak*, *Kam Bathna Maa Nasimu Salama* and *Barhum ya Barhum*.

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II

La waridi shada la kwanza kwalika
Maridadi nafusi hutaabika
Sina budi jama nimesalitika
Nimesalitika ...
Sina ngowa nimekipata kizuri
Wasitara wa haiba na fahari
Sawasawa zombo na zende sanjari
Sanjari...

The Rose

I

*The rose , the nice flower of fragrance
Mingled with the smells of udi, jasmine and afu¹³
Too much love obligates me
Obligates me!*

*The Rose, the beautiful cluster of graceful countenance
So pure the medicine of love ailment
Make a point of visiting me secretly
Secretly!*

II

*The rose, the first bud to open
So pure you make the self travail
No other choice, only you I am deeply in love
Deeply in love with you!*

*To no other, need I show this passion,
Since I've got you the beauty
You my saviour, full of grace and pride
Let the vessels travel in close company
In close company!*

The lyrics in *Waimbaji wa Juzi* were compiled and produced in 1967, when some of the artists who wrote them were still alive. It is striking, though not surprising, to find that almost no praise poetry was included in it. Does this mean that praise poems were not written at all? Were they simply missing or lost? Did the compiler have no interest in them? The fact that 'only' two residues of court praise lyrics are to be found in this anthology means that they were written and the compiler was interested in them, but for one reason or another they are missing. One of these two lyrics, actually makes no direct reference to the Sultan or his rule. It is just quoted in passing and carefully takes a neutral stance, never directly alluding to the Sultan or his regime, but to any good governance of any ruler. The exclusion of other praise lyrics which we suspect must have

¹³ *Udi* is aromatic aloe wood used for fumigation. *Afu* is wild jasmine.

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been deliberate and the effacement of the rest of this lyric indeed intended to protect the poet from the censure by the revolutionary government which is anti-aristocratic. Here is one of the residue from *Waimbaji wa Juzi* (1) – just one of its several stanzas:

Ni zipi zilizo zenye uweza
Zama zinajiri hazitosoza
Zimebaki zema ndiyo masaza
Which epochs are so hospitable like this
Indeed epochs do endlessly recur
Only the good ones last, in memory they remain

The other residue *Sifa za Waingereza*, sung by Mbaruku Taslim, is more explicit and is given in full length since the British rule was not regarded with such vehemence as that of the Sultan in post-revolution Zanzibar.¹⁴ Mbaruku himself was in fact given the title of ‘Meja’ (Major) as a token for his support to the British rule. He, in fact, performed in major military festivals in the First and Second World Wars. Mbaruku sang of the power of the British in *Sifa za Waingereza* (*Waimbaji wa Juzi* 87).

Sifa za Waingereza

I

Namsifu Mngereza	na Generali Smat <u>i</u>
Bara ameitengeza	meondowa tofau <u>ti</u>
Milima ameilaza	kwa suudi na bahat <u>i</u>
Hawajui pa kuke <u>ti</u>	chaka limengia Simba
Vita vya Moshi vigumu	tulisikia saut <u>i</u>
Ilipoteya kaumu	na jamii ya baru <u>ti</u>
Akakimbia hasim <u>u</u>	na wengi kuwa kaput <u>i</u>
Hawajui pa kuke <u>ti</u>	chaka limengia Simba

II

Aduwi wameduwaa	njia kuu hawap <u>i</u>
Mwituni wamesawaa	watakayo hawap <u>a</u>
Ni ajabu kumwona	Simba kukaa na nyat <u>i</u>
Hawajui pa kuke <u>ti</u>	chaka limengia Simba
Tanga na Dar es Salaam	twalikuta mlingot <u>i</u>
Nyamwezi hata manyema	tukesheya kwa mavit <u>i</u>
Hapo walipoegema	wakakaa madhubut <u>i</u>
Hawajui pa kuke <u>ti</u>	chaka limengia Simba

¹⁴ It was a success of the British’s ‘divide and rule’ policy; a puppet show in which the British hid themselves behind the curtain, pulling the strings, resulting in their ‘invisibility’ in which the rival contenders see nothing but their own hatred and enmity. It is important to note here that the Sultan himself and his administrative mechanism was part and parcel of British colonialism.

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Praise of the British Rule

I

*I praise the British and General Smart
They did well to end the discords on the mainland
They flattened the mountains with intent and luck
The enemy does not know where to hide
The bush is infested with lions.*

*The battle of Moshi was severe
We just heard the noises
Many people were lost
And many explosives were used
The enemy fled
Many of them died
The enemy does not know where to hide
The bush is infested with lions.*

II

*The enemies are so terrified
that they avoid the main road
They are scattered in the forest
Without getting what they want
It would be a miracle to see a lion
living with the buffalo
The enemy does not know where to hide
The bush is infested with lions.*

*In Tanga and Dar es Salaam
We saw the flag-masts
Nyamwezi and Manyema
Where we ended up sitting on chairs
And as we leaned on them
We saw the army sitting as smart as ever
The enemy does not know where to hide
The bush is infested with lions.*

Mbaruku's motivation to sing such songs of praise and satisfaction of British army and government for his loyalty that transfused to all East African audience through his songs and performance, were obvious. Fame, more recognition and perhaps material reward from the rulers were reciprocated to Mbaruku and he certainly took it as an incentive towards seeking a new role and function of taarab.

The Short or One Stanza Form

It is clear from our findings that there existed a lyric that can be called 'short' or 'one stanza form'. However, it is difficult to trace the origin of this short form or the time when it deviated from 'the mainstream'. If 'court' taarab was considered to be a precursor, then a deviated one

needed adjustment to suit ‘new’ and ‘popular’ needs. In this role, taarab sought a structure that was most suitable for this time, a structure that had affinity to *ngoma* (local dance) and was capable to bridge the performer / audience divide so characteristic of court taarab. Hence a new style of singing songs of short or one stanza form had a profound effect on the organisation of taarab performance. The short form is comparable to *Muyaka* (explanatory footnote) poetry whose remarkable feature is also ‘shortness’ and ‘brevity’. Whereas in the feudal era the rulers and other aristocrats had a lot of time to read or listen to the recitation of *tenzi* (long narrative poetry) for didactic purpose and leisure, during *Muyaka* time mercantile capitalism was at work making people more enterprising and comparatively busier.

In the performance of short forms of taarab lyrics, the gap between solo singer and the chorus was bridged since every participant was a potential soloist and audience at the same time. The leading role in singing was rotational among participants. Thus, the same tune or melody was constantly used for one stanza lyrics of the same structure but different content, sung by a number of participants. For example, the decline of Lamu’s fame and prosperity and the collapse of its cultural achievement were encapsulated in the following stanza sung by following a certain tune.

Yamekwisha	ya ngoma na matarabu
Ya kukesha	tukivaa na dhahabu
Kwa makasha	tunasitiri aibu

*Gone are the days of merry making
Of being engaged in ngoma and taarab
Of staying awake adorned with gold accessories
(Today,) we hide our disgrace in our chests*

The same tune would have been used by other singers in the group singing rotationally, using one stanza lyrics with different contents / themes altogether:

Wa imani	sinitiye maudhiko
Sili sinwi	mimi kwa fikira zako
Hata lini	kupata jawabu lako?

*Oh, ‘the compassionate’, don’t inflict pain in me
It’s hard to eat and drink when I think of you
Till when will I get your positive response?*

The rotational singing of a song with lyrics of the same structure but different contents for the same tune would go on and on, till every participant had a share in the soloist role. Then another tune (/ melody) and perhaps another lyrical structure would be introduced. The participants in this arrangement were supposed to internalise a number of lyrics and tunes that were circulating in the society as hit-songs, though occasionally, few of them, could compose new stanzas offhandedly. This is ‘communal singing’ – a typical feature of ‘classical’ African oral literature.

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Uguni' - The Irregular Form

Once taarab was out of the royal palace, it was also out of control of royal 'dictates'. In other words, it was now assigned new roles and functions different from those that were hereto regarded as élitist. It was thus becoming not only a means of entertainment, but an institution that gradually became synonymous with 'popular culture'. Taarab now became a music complex with the power to subvert an 'essentialist cultural identity' by positing what Barker (1999: 28) calls

[...] cultural identity that is constituted around points of difference [...] and is regarded [...] as a process of becoming [...] an identity that is continually being produced within vectors of similarity and difference [...] a continually shifting position and the points of difference around which cultural identities form are multiple and proliferating [...] that include identifications of class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nationality, morality and religion and each of these discursive positions are themselves unstable.¹⁵

The move by taarab, from narrow geo-cultural space to an open one, had 'now' a number of ramifications. Its affinity to 'mass culture' made it subversive towards the élitist tendencies, transforming itself into a new syncretistic form with more leaning towards local styles, though retaining some of the salient *transcultural* features. Thus, for the first time, we see local musical structures being heavily incorporated in taarab and influences being widely derived, not necessarily from Arabia, but also from India, the West and Latin America. The lyric now assumed varied themes, served many purposes and appeared in different forms and styles. Played both for amateurish and commercial purposes and now mediated in phonograph record, taarab gained more audience which gradually included segments of the East Africa communities where Swahili was spoken. This meant that taarab had to find new strategies of (re)structuring its body to appeal to the new vast audience that shared a common denominator – the Swahili language; an audience which otherwise constituted different socio-cultural mosaics.¹⁶

Apart from being 'panegyric' and romantically expressive, taarab lyric, adopted several thematic motifs from the popular culture articulated in such illocutionary acts as 'ridiculing', 'censuring the scandalous', 'actualising the purgative', 'asserting group or individual interests and outlooks', 'teaching ideals and conducts', 'recording life and history' and 'indulging in political and social critiquing' (Khamis 2002: 6). Messages were disseminated in expressive and narrative modes in a variety of lyrical forms as shown in *Waimbaji wa Juzi* in themes of love [*Ilahi* (12)], gossips and comic renditions [*Sikiza Sahibu* (11)], satires and momentous episodes [*Ilahi ya Wadudi* (24)], religious, moralistic and metaphysical assertions [*Huu Mwezi Mtukufu* (8)],

¹⁵ Read also Laura Fair (2001) and Janet Topp (1992).

¹⁶ Is it possible that the inclination towards the integration of the taarab of Siti's Group to local dance rhythm and poetry akin to that of oral literature is a result of the imposition by an International Company's Recording Policies of the 1930 Graebner (2003: 3-4) is referring to as much as we see the same trend continuing to date for the same purpose of expanding markets and gains?

reworked oral tales [*Watoto Mnara* (50), *Laini Hadisi* (53), *Hadisi Bibi na Vijakazi Vyake – Zamani* (54), *Hii Hekaya ya Abunuwas* (55), *Ukuti wa Mnazi* (60)], gnomic and enigmatic songs [*Kigalawa* (59), *Muhogo* (60)], songs depicting gender positions [*Hili Shairi Ihwani Nataraji* (58)], songs depicting ethnic and racial tensions [*Ya Rabbi Naidhihiri* (13), *Rabi Umri Tawili* (34), *Allahumma Twakuomba* (35), *Ukitafakuri* (56)], songs of political and social critique [*Hili Shairi la Umasikini Hufanyani* (31), *Si Mji Haukaliki* (51)], songs of innuendoes and reproaches [*Kigalawa* (59), *Muhogo* (60)], songs serving as chronicles and historical records [*Randa Kijini Randa/Mchangani* (16), *Nauliwa /Mtoto Aliya Kwao* (23), *Hili Shairi la Umasikini Hufanyani* (31), *Nalikuwa na Rafiki* (38), *Twakuomba* (39), *Nitaliba* (56)].

Rhyme Irregularity

The fact that written poetry associated with ‘court poetry’ was now relegated to ‘oral’ and ‘populist’ tendencies, the strict rules of prosody were also relaxed. The lyric did not aspire for rigidity and artificiality of a written text, but for flexibility and openness of an oral/performative one, where words interact or intermingle with the extra- and paralinguistic. Now it was not metre and rhyme that mattered, but semantic force and effect of the poetic diction in combination with musical and performative effects. Thus, rhyme irregularity became commonplace in the lyrics of *Waimbaji wa Juzi* - so abundant and recurring. It appears – to give a few examples – in *Koti na Suruwali* (14), *Usitaahari* (15), *Rabbi Twakuomba* (17), *Zimekuja Baruwa* (18), *Aziza Wanikondesha* (19), *Ela Nume* (21), *Ewe wa Imani* (22), *Nauliwani* (23), *Ilahi ya Wadudi* (24) etc. Here is *Koti na Suruwali* capturing ‘modernity’ by means of breaking prosodic, Islamic and cultural rules – the rules that have hereto resisted Western influences:

Koti na Suruwali

I

Koti na Suruwali	si hara <u>mu</u>
Hasa avae Bwana	ende za <u>mu</u>
Wapenda umtazame	wishe ha <u>mu</u>
Koti ...	

Nalipomuona	wala sikudha <u>ni</u>
Kwanza hana haya	pili mnyangany <u>i</u>
Ametumaliza	sote mitaa <u>ni</u>
Koti ...	

II

Unguja na Pemba	ni taifa mo <u>ja</u>
Watu maridadi	sote ni wamo <u>ja</u>
Vijana wazuri	Pemba na Ungu <u>ja</u>
Koti ...	

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Taabu mahana mapenzi wazimu
Ni jana adhabu jamaa nasifu
Laana mapenzi yakikughilibu
Koti ...

Coat and Trousers

I

*Coat and trousers
are not religiously forbidden
Especially when worn by a gentleman
who in turn, is visiting a second wife
You would like observing him
to quench your thirst
A coat ...*

*When I saw him
I couldn't imagine
First, he was shameless
and second a rouge
He's tricked us all
all in this quarter
A coat ...*

II

*Unguja and Pemba
are one nation
People here are smart,
(and) all are united
More beautiful are youths
Unguja na Pemba
A coat ...*

*Difficulties and discomfort
This is a crazy love
Yesterday I experienced torture
But I still praise my love
Cursed you must be
when love deceives you!
A coat ...*

Metric Irregularity

Metric irregularity is another feature of the lyrics in *Waimbaji wa Juzi*, showing that the violation of prosodic rules did take place in features other than rhyme. Metric irregularity gives not only an indication of the lyric's inclination towards 'orality', but also its being constrained by local musical beats not providing right rhythms for symmetry and metric balance usually found in Swahili

traditional poetry. Although metric irregularity can be found in different contexts, almost as a rule, it is found when an established song from a repertoire of oral tradition is parodied in taarab as in *Randa Kijini Randa* (16), *Laini Hadisi* (53), *Hadisi Bibi-na Vijakazi Vyake- Zamani* (54), *Hii Hekaya ya Abunuwas* (55) and *Mbembeleze Mtoto* (109). Here is an example (23).

Mtoto Aliliya Kwao

Mtoto aliliya kwao huyo bwana huyo
Kwimba na kumshangilia firimbi ngoma
Kombaniya sisi sote tutamshangiliya
Mtoto aliliya kwao

The Just Married Lady is Nostalgic

*The just married lady is nostalgic
about being taken far from home
Listen she is crying mister,
listen she is crying
Let's sing and cheer her up
with a flute and drumming
Let's together cheer her up
The just married lady is nostalgic
About being taken far from home*

Repetition as Irregularity

Isidore Okpweho (1992: 71) sees repetition as “[...] the most fundamental characteristic feature of oral literature having both an aesthetic and a utilitarian value, [a] device that not only gives a touch of beauty or attractiveness to a piece of oral expression (whether song or narrative or other kind of statement) but also serves certain practical purposes in the overall organisation of the oral performance.” Finnegan however, (1977: 130-131) does not only show the essence of repetition in oral poetry (hence oral literature), but asserts that “[...] the use of repetition in oral poetry is not just a utilitarian tool, but something which lies in the heart of all poetry. It is one of the main criteria by which we tend to distinguish poetry from prose.” She further observes that repetition, by nature of its function in oral literature, seems to be regarded, to a certain degree “[...] [a]s tedious and inappropriate in written form such that the amount of repetition in actual performance may not be fully represented in many written texts which purport to record it.”

The problem with the taarab lyric is that it situates itself ambiguously between ‘preparedness’ associated with written art and simultaneous ‘composition-in-performance’¹⁷ feasibility, associated with oral art (Khamis 2001:145-156) – and as such, a ‘high degree’ of repetition may

¹⁷ This term is borrowed from Finnegan (1977: 129).

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be regarded as a handicap in a poetic tradition where rigidity, symmetry and closure are measures of excellence. Only when we realise the fact that taarab lyric is written for the purpose of being performed that we can recognise and appreciate the role of repetition – for here, as far as we are concerned, a repetition is not just repetition, but a repetition with variation. Any statement that is uttered several times can not have the same effect or meaning, especially when it is uttered purposely to create variation for artistic and semantic effect.

By ‘irregular repetition’ we mean the non-symmetric type of repetition that is accentuated as part of performance features such as ‘antiphonal forms’, refrains, chorus or the direct repetition of leader’s lines, reduplication, lexico-structural and syntactic one. Some of the lyrics that employ this type of repetition in various methods in *Waimbaji wa Juzi* are *Shairi la Burudi* (25), *Kwaheri* (27), *Ukitaka Tamaduni* (30), *Twakuomba* (39), *Watoto Mnara* (50), *Pole Bibiye* (52), *Hili Shairi Ihwani Nataraji* (58), *Kigalawa* (59), *Ukutu wa Mnazi* (60), *Mbembeleze Mtoto* (109) etc. Here are two verses of *Siku Hizi* (110):

Siku Hizi

Siku hizi	siku hizi,	taabu na mashaka <u>yan<u>gu</u></u>
Siku hizi	siku hizi,	taabu na mashaka <u>yan<u>gu</u></u>
Usingizi	usingizi	siupati ulimwe <u>ngu</u>
Sijiwezi	sijiwezi	nimeshikwa na matu <u>ngu</u>
Sijiwezi	sijiwezi	nimeshikwa na matu <u>ngu</u>
Siku hizi,	siku hizi	mambo yamen <u>ipata</u>
Siku hizi,	siku hizi	mambo yamen <u>ipata</u>
Usingizi	usingizi	siupati kwa haki <u>ka</u>
Sijiwezi	sijiwezi	nimefikwa na mashaka
Na mashaka	na mashaka	nimeshikwa na mashaka
	Sijiwezi, sijiwezi	

These Days

*These days, these days
hardship and discomfort are mine
These days, these days
hardship and discomfort are mine
And sleep, and sleep
has vanished in my world
I can't relax, can't relax
I'm inflicted with pain
I can't relax, can't relax
I'm inflicted with pain*

*These days, these days
things weigh me down heavily
These days, these days
things weigh me down heavily*

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*And sleep, and sleep
indeed I can't sleep
I can't relax, can't relax
I'm full of problems
Full of problems, full of problems
I'm full of problems
I can't relax.*

'Kutojitosheleza' – Semantic Irregularity

'Kujitosheleza' – a verse to verse coherence for the meaning-whole of a poem – is a very important convention emphasised in Swahili traditional poetry. 'Kutojitosheleza' is exactly the opposite of 'kujitosheleza' since 'kutojitosheleza' implies 'fragmentation', 'fuzziness' and 'lack of cohesiveness'. With feature 'kutojitosheleza', most lyrics appear to be made by fusion of semantically incongruent pieces. Three scenarios are plausible for this 'grafting'. First, most lyrics of this type are episodic, intended to inform the audience through events that are topical, momentous and scandalous. Thus, it does not matter if several pieces of information are strung together in one or two separate lyrics as long as each piece conveys its own independent meaning as part of the gossip or scandalous. Second, this style was perhaps a later attempt towards the semantic homogeneity of the lyric and its lengthening, from one to 'three' and 'four' stanzas which is to a certain extent a trend to this day. Examples in *Waimbaji wa Juzi* are abundant as this one shows (60):

Muhogo

Muhogo wa Jang'ombe sijauramba mwiko
Msitukane wakunga na uzazi ungaliko
Muhogo ...

Chupa rupiya nane tumekunywa watu wane
Gilisini imekwisha nipe chupa nitazame
Muhogo

Cassava

*The cassava of Jang'ombe I have not tasted it
Do not abuse the midwives deliveries are still forthcoming
Cassava*

*An eight rupee bottle of spirit was consumed by four people
(If) there's nothing in the glass, let me check the bottle
Cassava*

Thirdly, the lyric could have developed from a situation of an 'antiphonal' or 'dialogue poetry' in which a certain part of the song from a soloist is a reaction and another part from another or the same soloist is released as a response. Thus, the statement and response trickle as one song in

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terms of melodic flow but are relatively separated as both lyrics (now combined as one song), work in different innuendoes. Here is an example (102):

Wewe Paka

I

Wewe paka kwani waniudhiyani
Wewe paka unaudhi majirani
Utapigwa ukalipiwe faini
Ukalipiwe faini

Mimi paka sasa napigiwani
Mimi paka sili cha mtu si nani
N'najuta kuingia vibandani
N'najuta kuingia vibandani

II

Naona unyonge kitu gani
Ni upweke masikini duniani
Hali sina la kufanya ela Mola Mannani
Mola Mannani
Langu tiba imeingiwa na huzuni
Matilaba nimeyapata zamani
Ukizinga utarajea ngamani
Utarejea ngamani.

You Cat!

I

*You cat, why do you vex me?
You cat, you do harass neighbours
You'll be beaten and a fine will be paid
A fine will be paid*

*I, the cat, why am I beaten?
I, the cat, I don't eat anybody's food –
I'm nobody
I regret to enter the hut
I regret to enter the hut*

II

*Why do I feel so sad?
It's this loneliness in this world, poor me
I'm powerless I only rely on God the Great
God the Great
My love is so full of sadness
Only in the past things were fruitful to me
If you seek to vex me more, you'll end up where you are*

Free Verse Style

In the past, though rarely, free verse style was used to compose narrative verses in which stories were related. This again, is a clear evidence of recourse to a more fluid and popular oral tradition. In modern taarab's sub-category of *mipasho* (as we shall later demonstrate), free verse style has gained frequency. Here is a portion of 'This is the Story of Abunuwas', *Hii Hikaya ya Abunuwas* from *Waimbaji wa Juzi* (55). This story parodies a well known Swahili oral tale:

Hii Hikaya ya Abunuwas

I

Mwanzo wa maneno ... Abunuwas alikuwa anapendwa sana
na Harun Rashid. Hata akawa Harun Rashid
hawezi kushinda siku moja asimwone Abunuwas.
Hata siku moja akawa Abunuwas anataka kununuwa Punda na fedha hana.
Akatoka akenda nyumbani kwa Harun Rashid.
Na wakati si wakati wa kwenda watu.
Akataka idhini ya kupanda juu.
Mabawabu wakamwambia, 'Watu hawana ruhusa sasa kwenda juu.'
Na wale mabawabu wajuwa kuwa leo Abunuwas muhitaji.
Akatoka bawabu mkubwa akasema, 'Ntakupa ruhusa upande juu.
Utakachopata tugawane.'
Abunuwas akasema, 'Vema ninakubali ...'

This the Story of Abunuwas

I

*Let me start with these words ... Abunuwas was very much loved
by Harun Rashid. So much so that Harun Rashid
would not be happy if he had not seen Abunuwas the whole day.
One day Abunuwas wanted to buy a donkey and he had no money.
He went to Harun Rashid's palace.
But the time was not right for people to see Harun Rashid.
He wanted permission to go upstairs.
The guards told him, "People are not allowed now to go upstairs."
And the guards knew that Abunuwas was in need of something from Harun Rashid.
So the head guard said, "I'll allow you to go upstairs on the condition that whatever
you get there we should share."
Abunuwas said, "Okay, I agree."*

Taarab Lyric and Media Influences

Almost from the outset, taarab had a close interconnectedness with media technologies, chronologically developing from phonograph record (1920s), sound film (1930s/40s), radio (1950s), audio cassette, to TV and video (1970s), and recently, public national and transnational (satellite) television. Each of the above mentioned media technology had different but cumulative impact

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on taarab, as different media developed from simple to complex characters, having different capabilities involving only ‘sound’ in phonograph record, radio and audio cassette and ‘sound / moving visual images’ in sound film, video and television. The range of complexity of the media, is also to be observed in comparing the dissemination of taarab songs through sound like phonograph record – usually used in private space – radio, directed towards public space and audio cassette, whose influence oscillates between private to public space. This is also true of sound film, which is closer to private space than video and television serving local/national viewers or transnational ones.

From 1950s, through impact of radio and later audio cassette and video, taarab has drawn quite a lot of influences. The most important influence is of course the transnational musical styles (e.g. Arabic – from Egypt and the Gulf States or Arabian Peninsula – Indian, Afro-Cuban/American and Western).¹⁸ It is not unusual to hear in taarab foreign music styles and beats of *wahed u-nus*, *sumsumia*, rumba, chachacha, bolero, salsa, waltz and tango. All these styles however, are not simply parodied but remoulded and twisted to make Roberts¹⁹ assert:

Compared with ‘upcountry’ African music, the melody lines are long, and the vocal style is like Arab and Indian singing. But the differences become obvious if ever you hear a singer using real Arabic tune: the Arabic melody and the Swahili lyric don’t quite mesh. On the whole tarabu (also taarab) melodies are, so to say, more four-square than Arab melodies. Similarly, tarabu drumming might sound very Arabic or Indian, but it isn’t: It is built on Arab and Indian elements, which is not the same thing.

Another influence is of course, the varied (in)fluxes and mixes of different beats and melodic measures (i.e whether long or short sequences or duration of musical lines) which render the lyric different forms and shapes structurally. With the influence of mass communication through radio and audio cassettes and hence the dissemination of local and transnational beats and tunes, the lyric composers were placed in a vintage position to experiment on metric patterning, linearity, linear division, rhyme scheme (both internal and end rhyming) and refrain or chorus. Some of the remarkable variations are:

¹⁸ It is the most important influence for two reasons. First, as we have pointed out earlier, taarab had not influenced the taarab lyric but rather found Swahili poetry already well established in Swahili literature, hence readily utilised it, because it bore quite close affinity with Arabic taarab lyric. Second, it is clear that the musical styles have affected the taarab lyric in many ways as it will be shown in due course.

¹⁹ A blurb on the jacket of the album ‘Songs the Swahili Sing’ compiled by John Storm Roberts – date not given.

- 3L:8Ma/c/d(-)8Mb ▼2LR8Mf/j
- 3L:6Ma/c/d(-)6Mb ▼2LR6c/e
- 3L:4Mb/d/(-)8Mc/e/g ▼3LR4h/j(-)Mi/k²⁰

In fact, between the 1950s and 1970s, there was not much of a change of ‘shape’ of the lyric, no change of visual representation or the way the lyric is seen. It was either ‘tristich’ or ‘quatrain’ with metric measure of 8:8, 6:6 and 4:8 syllables. What changed most in the lyric during this time, is the internal mechanism of the structure of the lyric demonstrated by treatment of words as tropes, figures, symbols, values, processes, arrangement of linguistic constituents as syntactic patterns, repetition, relational placement of constituents in terms of affinity and opposition facilitated by ‘paradigmatic’ and ‘syntagmatic’ relations of constituents. Substantial amount of thematic motifs, tropes, symbols, imagery and figures of speech have also been overtly or covertly acquired in the lyric from media influences – especially from external radio programmes and Egyptian, Indian and American sound films. Here is one example among many, utilising the symbol *zabibu* (grapes), the thematic motif of ‘courtyard’ and the concept of ‘paradise’ that often recur:

Zabibu

Nilipita kitaluni	kwenye wingi wa mau <u>wa</u>
Na matunda ya peponi	mazuri ya kuchagu <u>wa</u>
Zabibu na marumani	vyote vyajifaragu <u>wa</u>
Zabibu zi mikononi	kuzila zanisumbu <u>wa</u>

Grapes

*I stepped into a court garden
Where there were many flowers
And fruit(s) of paradise
Indeed a selected variety
Grapes and pomegranates
Vaunting themselves
Though grapes are in my hands
I find it hard to eat them!*

The most recent experiment in the lyric *Ya Qamary* shows a complex deviation and variation of metric length, linear division, rhyme and refrain whose shape seems to have been constrained by the melody put on it.

²⁰ From a survey of over 400 taarab lyrics gathered during our research (between 2000 and 2003), we have delineated about 15 types of forms and shapes having a number of lines, linear division, metric, rhythmic and rhyme variations. We have however, to give only a few examples here for a lack of space. Here ‘L’ stands for lines, ‘M’ for metre, ‘a, b, c ...’ for rhymes, ‘LR’ for lines of refrain and ▼ for bottom line.

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Ya Qamary

	Hakika kionana nawe (9)	azizy (3)	yanayotokeza (6)	(metre syllables)
	Huwa na kiwewe (6)	habibty (3)	bali hujikaza (6)	(metre syllables)
	Ungejuwa mwenyewe (7)	hayaty (3)	vipi wanitanza (6)	(metre syllables)
<i>Refrain:</i>	A (1)	ya huby (3)	mpenzi (3)	(metre syllables)
	A (1)	ya alby (3)	wangu wa moyoni (6)	(metre syllables)
	A (1)	ya umri (3)	duniani (4)	(metre syllables)
	A (1)	ya hayati (4)	mpaka peponi (6)	(metre syllables)

The Moon

*Truly when I see you the rarity, strange things happen
I become nervous my love, but pretend nothing happens
I wish you knew my life, how you puzzle me*

*Refrain: Oh you my love, the one I adore
Oh you my heart, you who are in it
Oh you, the reason for me to be in this world
Oh you my life, even in paradise*

Thematically, the emphasis on the lyric of this time was ‘love’ and ‘romance’, so much so that it made Topp assert about its apolitical nature. Referring to the money-raising role of taarab of this time for political organisations, she observes that “... [I]t is likely, though, that while these clubs acknowledged the potential of taarab to earn money for their particular organisation (by having fee-paying members, for example), they did not exploit the potential of taarab songs themselves to promote any political objectives” (Of course this is not absolutely true since political songs were already written during Siti’s era and also during this time though somehow obscured in symbolism – *my emphasis*). It was often after the revolution in 1964 that poems with political themes were written and sung. It was after the revolution that we see the pervasive emphasis on political theme being introduced consciously by the ruling party and government as part of the ideological tool; a theme that was disseminated in taarab lyrics generally through ‘march’ beat – which was again, an Egyptian influence. One of the first songs after the revolution to be sung by *Ikhwan Safa Club* with this theme is *Songa Mbele*:

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Songa Mbele

	Kumbuka tulivyokuwa	Wakati wa ukoloni
	Hapana lililokuwa	Kututoa utumwani
	Ndipo tukainyakuwa	serikali visiwani
<i>Chorus:</i>	Songa mbele songa mbele	Tumia yako maguvu
	Si wakati wa kelele	ondoa wako uviyu

Ondoa wako uviyu
Tumia yako maguvu
Songa mbele
Songa mbele!

Move Forward

*Remember how we were
during the colonial time
Nothing happened
to liberate us from slavery
That is why we've snatched
the government of the islands*

Chorus:
*Move forward, move forward
Use your energies
It's not a time of words
Leave behind your laziness
Leave behind your laziness
Use your energies
Move forward
Move forward!*

The Lyric, Modernity and Commercialisation of Taarab

From the beginning, the role of taarab was equivocal, swaying between ‘amateurishness’ and ‘semi-professionalism’. If taarab began as music of patronage, some sort of remuneration must have been attached to it, though at this point, not to an extent of being regarded substantial. A boost towards commercialisation of taarab came when this music was put in phonograph record. Siti bint Saad and her group played an important role in being the first group to be incorporated in the industry. Though, as Suleiman (1969: 88) suggests, phonograph records found their way to many Swahili speaking areas in Tanganyika, Uganda and Kenya, and were also sold in Congo (Kinshasa), Comoros, Somalia and Southern Arabia, there is plenty of evidence to show that the artists could not live solely on this music. Often this group played just to enjoy themselves and entertain their audience at a locality in the Stone Town area of Zanzibar known as Mayungwani and in Siti’s house at Vikokotoni where guests could play such games of card as *Wahed wa Sitini* and listen to taarab music of this group (1969: 90).

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The famous *Ikhwan Safah Club* also started as amateurish group performing in the club building or during day-outs and competitions. Later, the performance scope was gradually broadened to include wedding ceremonies of one of the members of the club or of his family. Then taarab was put in a form of ‘concert show’ taking place twice a year during Idd festivities. In the 1970s *Ikhwan Safah Club* and other clubs started to be hired for wedding ceremonies of non-members. This was now acceptable by clubs, not for personal gains, but for securing funds to pay rent of the club building, electricity and water bills, transportation and the purchase of musical instruments and their spare-parts. A further step towards commercialisation of taarab happened when clubs were paid to record their music in the studios of *Sauti ya Unguja* (after revolution *Radio Tanzania Zanzibar*), TVZ (*Television Zanzibar*) and *Radio Tanzania Dar es Salaam*.

A totally new phase towards the commercialisation of taarab was marked by the introduction of audio and video cassettes in East Africa in the 1980s. With a new impetus towards composition, variation and large scale productions, the introduction of audio and video cassettes took the commercialisation of taarab to a higher level. Initially, only vendors, normally engaged in pirating, gained financially from the sales of taarab cassettes. The situation improved from 2000 to date, when individual artists get royalties of some sort to enable them (at least some of them) to live on music as this became clear in our research.

This led to the intensification of commercialisation and diversification of taarab through modernisation, manifesting as both Giddens’ prime metaphor of juggernaut (1989: page) – an uncontrollable engine of enormous power which sweeps away all that stand before it and Featherstone’s spatial and relational notion (1995: page). That is, on the one hand, modernity is a post-traditional historical period marked by industrialism, capitalism, the nation-state and forms of surveillance (Barker 1999: 173) and on the other, a relational quality sprouting from a comparison of two states of a given art; one quite obsolete and the other detaching or detached from the old form, emanating novel features or (re)introducing old ones in different effects, magnitude and styles.

From 1980, especially after the war with Idi Amin’s regime of Uganda, Tanzania economy started to decline rapidly and hence was more and more drawn to the all-powerful world capitalist system. This was indeed a significant break from the so called controlled unitary economy and culture. Gradually it was obvious that the ruling party and the state was losing grapple of almost all its institutions, especially the cultural ones. A new drive towards survival and competition emerged in the society where the most astute saw the lucrative potential of taarab. As a result of this, taarab artists, especially from Tanga in the 1970s, started to explore the possibility of changing the style of taarab from being melodious, less percussive and romantic to being more percussive, vibrant and sensational for the purpose of winning a new audience. Such a shift needed a kind of (re)structuring of the music complex. Hence, quantitative and qualitative

changes, especially in instrumentation where orchestration (of *firqah*²¹ type) is narrowed down to a small group of singers, chorus and musicians, playing keyboard, solo guitar, rhythm guitar, bass guitar, bongo or drum-kit, dropping out *ūd* (lute), violin, cello, double bass, *nai* (flute), rattle, accordion, harmonica, *dumbak* and tambourine. The method of playing these instruments has also changed from being Oriental or / and Western, to being traditional, creating a *dance mode* which is hereto a rare feature in taarab. This (re)structuring of taarab means a choice of a new audience and a shift towards more public space.

Mipasho and the Taarab Lyric

Mipasho is a sub-category of ‘modern taarab’ whose name is derived from a type of lyric that thrives on openness, cynicism, sexism, sensationalism and exchange of abuses and insults and on ‘performance’ that is deliberately calculated to appeal through sensuality and eroticism (Khamis 2002: 201), which is not a new phenomenon altogether in its character but in its force, pervasion, magnitude and openness. The name of this sub-genre is derived from the nature of the lyric – the centre of its attention and importance. The word *mipasho* being derived from Swahili verb *pasha*, meaning ‘cause to get’, though in this case what one gets is abuse and humiliation. The word *pasha*, also means idiomatically, to tell things openly and bluntly; to tell them in a non-euphemistic way. *Mipasho* is thus, a type of taarab that draws attention to itself by means of its lyric in which motifs are expressed point blankly, emphasised through repetition, issues (if any issues at all) are personalised and the melodious mode used to characterise the traditional form is relegated to percussive one. Like rock music, as Rosselson (1979: 46) observes

“[...] the message [...] is that words do not matter. The style matters, the froth, the bubbles, the colours, the lights, the clothes, the charisma, the sound, the bodily movements, the beat – these matter. The words don’t matter.” [at least do not impress the artistic – *my emphasis*].

Any significance they may attempt to carry is inevitably defeated by that message.

Topp’s definition of *mipasho* emphasising rival *ngoma* like *lelemama*, leaves out the most important features that led it to deviate from the mainstream – a feature described by Askew (2000: 31) as common to all types of taarab throughout East Africa; of being inherently unstable and prone to much fission and fusion such that gives room for artists to leave one club to join another in search of *maslahi* or a ‘better life’. However, what does not come out quite clearly in Askew’s seemingly correct observation is the fact that when an artist abandons a club for another, looking for *maslahi* (monetary gains), the assumption is that the style of the club s/he joins must be the most prominent and appropriate for his/her dream of better life to be realised. Hence, in some

²¹ A *firqah* is a large Arabic orchestra incorporating Western orchestral instruments and more popular instruments such as piano accordion. The *firqah* replaced the *takht* ensemble in Egypt in the 1940s (Topp 2000:39).

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cases, as is the case of *mipasho*, when artists did not have a most prominent taarab to join (for *maslahi*) some left their old clubs to ‘create’ new ones to experiment on new styles that would guarantee the attainment of *maslahi*. For *mipasho*, this has been possible due to the following:

- the socio-cultural and political scenario in Tanzania has changed radically towards liberalisation – a favourable situation for any artefact aspiring to be apolitical and non-committal, hence the mushrooming of all sorts of ‘empty ditties’ or ‘anything-goes’ or ‘anything and everything’ sells.
- artists have progressively (over years) perceived and exploited the lucrative potential of taarab which ought to go hand in hand with change in instrumentation, diversification of its structure and audience and its connectedness to the fast developing media technology. For example, to maximise profit, *mipasho* style which came in the limelight in the 1990s, uses few instruments. This allows few (only few?) *mipasho* artists to move about lightly (which they frequently do as they commute between Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam or Mombasa or even Nairobi these days) targeting an audience that is attracted by night life or entertainment with dance music from ‘live band’ combined with commotion, sex and alcoholism.
- with the intensification of global exchange of commodities in which Africa is merely the recipient, a state of cargo mentality has been intensified. This has in turn created a situation in which songs depicting an illusion of being ‘free’ and ‘wishful thinking’ are forthcoming aimed at lulling the mind, at least momentarily. TX (foreign experts with fat wallets), Pajero, mobile phone, booze, cosmetics, accessories, fashion-clothes, US dollars, hair-styles, perfumery, television and images, computer and its appendages and adultery are part of the modern language of the lyric.
- an opportunity for the artists to make more money than they used to make in the past as a result of more frequency in the performance of taarab (e.g. every weekend) and sales of audio and video cassettes. In fact *mipasho* has been so successful towards capturing certain segments of society and making money, that competition has grown to include new forms of music or performing arts (e.g. *Segere* and *Mbeleko*) with no historical (genealogical) or generic connection or affiliation to taarab, but have simply taken up the attribute ‘modern taarab’ or *mipasho* to benefit from its popularity.

The most striking feature of *mipasho* is its ‘drastic’ change from traditional to postmodernist trend. For example, it posits change in its lyric, from being prosodic to being relatively blank or free in style, showing in some cases, a lot of fragmentariness, fuzziness and incoherence. Its musical style tends to be more percussive, vibrant and vigorous than melodious. The content of the lyric has also changed from being oblique and romantic to being direct, sexist and abusive or anything that opiates. The lyric is regarded as being so obnoxious, often stirring public debate. Dance and sexually accentuated body movements by performers and audience is *mipasho*’s main attraction that has also helped narrowing the performer/audience divide in live performance.

This ‘change phenomenon’ in taarab and its lyric, can be shown to be closer to Barker’s cultural paradigm that “[...] the ‘figural’ as core to post-modern turn is more visual, draws from

everyday life, contests rationalist views of culture and immerse the spectator in his/her desire in the cultural object ...” Thus, in our view, any analysis of *mipasho* must be carried out with a holistic approach that views an artefact as affected object which in turn affect other societal concomitants. The question of morality is tied up with the whole fabric of the society. A moral decline is etiologically a sign that something else is wrong in the society. If we approach taarab or its *mipasho* sub-genre this way, it will be seen as part of what Barker (1999: 40-41) calls *chaos culture* in which “[...] the idea that the institutional aspects of modernity are driving the cultural and ethnic in a linear fashion is challenged [...]” Not only does the cultural shape the economic, and indeed our very models of globalisation, but also metaphor of uncertainty, contingency and ‘chaos’ replace those of order, stability and systemacity. Rather than conceptualise global culture in terms of one-way determinations, either from the ‘west-to-the-rest’ or from economics to culture, we might see their operation as *rhizomorphic*.

Here is a typical *mipasho* lyric showing a number of new features undermining the traditional ones: the change to blank and free-verse style with violation of some conventions associated with prosody, tendency for the lyric to be fragmented and fuzzy, tendency for the narrative thrust and for the sequence of events to run incoherently, presence of marked repetition of motifs and phrases, blunt and abusive nature of the lyric’s style, essential dialogical mode of singing in which the verbal exchange is enacted between the soloist and the chorus, endowment in the lyric of a new vocabulary built on modern gadgets, fashion wear and accessories as part of the subject matter which has also got to do with belittlement of rival contenders.

Kinyang’unya

<i>Chorus (1):</i>	Kinyang’unya usitake ya watu	kinyang’unya
	Kinyang’unya yako yanakushinda	kinyang’unya
	Kinyang’unya usitake ya watu	kinyang’unya
	Kinyang’unya yako yanakushinda	kinyang’unya
	Kinyang’unya kumbe hujaboya	si bure umerogwa
	Kinyang’unya kumbe hujagoya	si bure umerogwa
<i>Soloist (1):</i>	Nasikia wewe nasikia	nasikia wewe wajitapa
	Nasikia wewe nasikia	nasikia wewe wajitapa
	Watu ukiwajulisha	wewe ukiwajulisha
	Watu ukiwajulisha	wewe ukiwajulisha
	Eti n’nakuogopa nakuogopa	wataka kunikomesha
	Eti n’nakuogopa nakuogopa	wataka kunikomesha
	Kitu gani wajitapa	una nini kibahasha?
	Kitu gani wewe wajitapa	una nini kibahasha?
	Wabaki kutapatapa	mapresha umepandisha
	Wabaki kutapatapa	mapresha umepandisha
<i>Chorus (2):</i>	Kanzu yako ya rubamba	utayemliza nani?
	Ina vipandevipande	karibu ya thelathini
	Kanzu yako ya rubamba	utayemliza nani?
	Ina vipandevipande	karibu ya thelathini

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	Abebedua wenziwe	yeye
	Yeye ajiona kwini	yeye
	Apiga watu vikumbo	yeye
	Tumjue yeye nani	yeye
	Abebedua wenziwe	yeye
	Yeye ajiona kwini	yeye
	Apiga watu vikumbo	yeye
	Tumjue yeye nani	yeye
	Vicheko vinagongana	heheee
	Wengine wanafinyana	naye huyu huyu
	Vicheko vinagongana	heheee
	Wengine wanafinyana	naye huyu huyu
	Kisha wanaulizana	aaa naye huyu, kapata nini?
	Kisha wanaulizana	aaa naye huyu, kaja saa ngapi?
	Kinyang'unya hupendezi	hata ukivaa nini
	Kinyang'unya hupendezi	hata ukivaa nini
<i>Soloist (2):</i>	Ya mjini huyawezi	
<i>Chorus (3):</i>	Yangoje ya kilingeni	
<i>Soloist (2):</i>	Ya mjini huyawezi	
<i>Chorus (3):</i>	Yangoje ya kilingeni	
<i>Chorus (3):</i>	Kinyang'unya usitake ya watu	kinyang'unya
	Kinyang'unya yako yanakushinda	kinyang'unya
	Kinyang'unya usitake ya watu	kinyang'unya
	Kinyang'unya yako yanakushinda	kinyang'unya
	Kinyang'unya kumbe hujagoya	si bure umerogwa
	Kinyang'unya kumbe umegoya	si bure umerogwa
<i>Soloist (4):</i>	Watamba eti nawe watamba	watamba eti ndio mwenyewe
	Watamba eti nawe watamba	watamba eti ndio mwenyewe
	Kila kitu wamechisha	eti nawe wamechisha
	Kila kitu wamechisha	kila kitu wamechisha
	Na uliye naye wewe 'naye wewe	mambo unamridhisha
	Na uliye naye wewe 'naye wewe	mambo unamridhisha
	Niambie ndiye wewe	shoga mbona umechusha
	Niambie ndiye wewe	shoga mbona umechusha
	Umenyorodoka wewe	karagosi unatisha
	Umenyorodoka wewe	karagosi unatisha
<i>Chorus (4):</i>	Kanzu yako ya rubamba	utayemliza nani?
	Ina vipandevipande	karibu ya thelathini
	Kanzu yako ya rubamba	utayemliza nani?
	Ina vipandevipande	karibu ya thelathini
	Abebedua wenziwe	yeye
	Yeye ajiona kwini	yeye
	Apiga watu vikumbo	yeye
	Tumjue yeye nani	yeye

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	Abebedua wenziwe	yeye	
	Yeye ajiona kwini	yeye	
	Apiga watu vikumbo	yeye	
	Tumjue yeye nani	yeye	
	Vicheko vinagongana	heheee	
	Wengine wanafinyana	naye huyu huyu	
	Vicheko vinagongana	heheee	
	Wengine wanafinyana	naye huyu huyu	
	Kisha wanaulizana	aaa naye huyu kapata nini?	
	Kisha wanaulizana	aaa naye huyu kaja saa ngapi?	
	Kinyang'unya hupendezi	hata ukivaa nini	
	Kinyangu'unya hupendezi	hata ukivaa nini	
<i>Soloist (5):</i>	Ya mjini huyawezi		
<i>Chorus (5):</i>	Yangoje ya kilingeni		
<i>Soloist (6):</i>	Ya mjini huyawezi		
<i>Chorus (6):</i>	Yangoje ya kilingeni		
<i>Soloist (7):</i>	Kanzu yako ya rubamba, kanzu yako ya rubamba	nd'o roho itanirusha eee	
	Kanzu yako ya rubamba, kanzu yako ya rubamba	nd'o roho itanirusha eee	
	Kanzu yako ya rubamba, kanzu yako ya rubamba	nd'o roho itanirusha eee	
	Kanzu yako ya rubamba, kanzu yako ya rubamba	nd'o roho itanirusha eee	
	Usoni huyo usoni		
<i>Chorus (7):</i>	Usoni amejipamba	kwa meshedo anatisha	
	Uwanjani anatamba	viroja anaoyesha	
<i>Soloist (8):</i>	Usoni yeye usoni		
<i>Chorus (8):</i>	Usoni amejipamba	kwa mashedo anatisha	
	Uwanjani anatamba	viroja anaoyesha	
	Hatutakwenda sambamba	mwenzangu umechemsha	
	Hatutokwenda sambamba	mwenzangu umechemsha	
	Kinyang'unya vipodozi	hujui upake nini	
	Mchana wa jua kali	ming'aro iko machoni	
	Kinyang'unya vipodozi	hujui upake nini	
	Mchana wa jua kali	ming'aro iko machoni	
	Usiku uking'ia	unajifanya umewahini	
	Eti miwani ya jua	unaivaa gizani	
	Usiku uking'ia	unajifanya umewini	
	Eti miwani ya jua	unaivaa gizani	

VERSATILITY OF THE TAARAB LYRIC

- Umeyataka mwenyewe iliyobaki shauri yako
Umeyataka mwenyewe iliyobaki shauri yako
Presha itapanda na kisha itashuka kinyang'unya
Presha itapanda na kisha itashuka kinyang'unya
Akutake nani wewe ajigonge nani wewe?
- Soloist (6):* Eti anasema watu, eti anasema watu kinyang'unya achekesha eee
Eti anasema watu, eti anasema watu kinyang'unya achekesha eee
Eti anasema watu, eti anasema watu kinyang'unya achekesha eee
Eti anasema watu, eti anasema watu kinyang'unya achekesha eee
Kavaa yeye kavaa
- Chorus (6):* Kavaa yatu la butu
Kwenye soli limekwisha
Amejisuka mabutu
Nywele wiki hajaosha
- Soloist (7):* Kavaa yeye kavaa
- Chorus (7):* Kavaa yatu la butu
Kwenye soli limekwisha
Amejisuka mabutu
Nywele wiki hajaosha
- Usiyatake ya watu na hutotubabaisha
Usiyatake ya watu na hutotubabaisha
Usiyatake ya watu na hutotubabaisha
- Soloist (8):* Kutamba kwako ni kwepi
- Chorus (8):* Kinyang'unya si mkeka
- Soloist (9):* Unajifanya ni keki
- Chorus (8):* Kinyang'unya si mkeka
- Soloist (10):* Heri tambara la deki
- Chorus (8):* Kinyang'unya si mkeka
- Soloist (11):* Aaa, nenda 'uko
- Chorus (8):* Kinyang'unya si mkeka
- Soloist (12):* Kinyang'unya, kinyangu'nya usitake ya watu ukome eeee
Ya wenzio wayavalia viatu lione 'iloooo

Kinyang'unya, kinyang'unya usitake ya watu ukome weee
Ya wenzio wayavalia viatu lione 'iloooo

Huya, huya, huya ...

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You Old Rag

Chorus (1): *You Old Rag, imitate not what others do, You Old Rag
You Old Rag, can't even manage your own affairs, You Old Rag
You Old Rag, imitate not what others do, You Old Rag
You Old Rag, can't even manage your own affairs, You Old Rag
You Old Rag, you haven't yet exhausted your moves,
It isn't accidental, you must've been bewitched!
You Old Rag, you haven't yet exhausted your moves,
It isn't accidental, you must've been bewitched!*

Soloist (1): *I hear you, I hear,
I hear you bestir yourself
I hear you, I hear,
I hear you bestir yourself
You go about informing people,
yes, you inform them
You go about informing people,
yes you inform them
That I am afraid, afraid of you,
since you want to thwart me
That I am afraid, afraid of you,
since you want to thwart me
What are you boasting yourself for?
What do you have after all you nonentity?
What are you boasting yourself for?
What do you have after all you nonentity?
You're just panicking,
Your blood pressure is high
You're just panicking,
Your blood pressure is high*

Chorus (2): *Your dress is the cheapest
who would want to wear it?
It has patches and patches
about thirty in number
Your dress is the cheapest,
who would want to wear it?
It has patches and patches
about thirty in number

She tries to ridicule others, she tries
She thinks she is a queen, she thinks
She keeps on imposing herself on others, she keeps on
She wants to be known who she is, she wants

She tries to ridicule others, she does
She thinks she is a queen, she thinks
She keeps on imposing herself on others, she keeps on
She wants to be known who she is, she wants*

VERSATILITY OF THE TAARAB LYRIC

*Streams of laughter float in the air, heheee,
while others exchange secret signs,
saying: "this nonentity!"*
*Streams of laughter float in the air, heheee,
while others exchange secret signs,
saying: "this nonentity!"*

*And then they ask one another
"Ah, this one, what has she got?"
"Ah, this one, when did she come (to town)?"*

*You Old Rag, you can never be attractive,
Whatever style of your dressing
You Old Rag, you can never be attractive,
Whatever style of your dressing*

Soloist (2): *You can't cope with matters of the town*

Chorus (3): *Wait for matters of the bush*

Soloist (2): *You can't cope with matters of the town*

Chorus (3): *Wait for matters of the bush*

Repeat Chorus (1)

Soloist (3): *Even you strut proudly, strut proudly!
You strut proudly, saying you are the winner
Even you strut proudly, strut proudly!
You strut proudly, saying you are the winner
You match every item you wear
Even you match every item you wear!
You match every item you wear
You match every item you wear
And the partner you have, you have
You say you satisfy him for every thing he wants
And the partner you have, you have
You say you satisfy him for everything he wants
Tell me, are you the lady I know!
How ugly you look now?
Tell me, are you the lady I know!
How ugly you look now?
You have become so thin
You are like a puppet, you look horrible!
You are like a puppet, you look horrible!*

Repeat Chorus (2)

Repeat Soloist (2)

Repeat Chorus (3)

Repeat Soloist (2)

Repeat Chorus (3)

Soloist (4): *[Now she sings the Chorus line (2)]*

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- Chorus (4): *You have painted your face with colours,
You look horrible
She struts proudly as she dances on the floor
She demonstrates clumsy moves*
- Soloist (5): *On her face on her face*
- Chorus (5): *You have painted your face with colours,
You look horrible
She struts proudly as she dances on the floor
She demonstrates clumsy move*
- You will never be at par with me
My friend your moves are futile
You will never be at par with me
My friend your moves are futile*
- You Old Rag, you don't know how to use cosmetics
In broad daylight bright colours mark your eyes
You Old Rag, you don't know how to use cosmetics
In broad daylight bright colours mark your eyes
When the night comes you act like a winner
Sun-goggles you wear them in the dark
When the night comes you act like a winner
Sun-goggles you wear them in the dark*
- You wanted this verbal jarring, it's up to you now
You wanted this verbal jarring, it's up to you now
Your blood-pressure will rise and then fall, Old Rag
Your blood-pressure will rise and then fall, Old Rag
Who wants you, who would fall for you?*
- Soloist (6): *Even you abuse people, you abuse people!
You really make me laugh Old Rag eee
Even you abuse people, you abuse people!
You really make me laugh Old Rag eee
Even you abuse people, you abuse people!
You really make me laugh Old Rag eee
Even you abuse people, you abuse people!
You really make me laugh Old Rag*
- Chorus (6): *She's put on worn out shoes
whose soles have been eaten away
She's plaited her hair in an old-fashion style
Hair not washed for a week*
- Soloist (7): *She's put on, put on*
- Chorus (7): *She's put on worn our shoes
whose soles have been eaten away
She has plaited here hair in an old-fashioned style
Hair not washed for a week*
- Don't interfere with other people's affairs,
you can fool no one*

VERSATILITY OF THE TAARAB LYRIC

- Don't interfere with other people's affairs,
you can fool no one
Don't interfere with other people's affairs,
you can fool no one*
- Soloist (8): *What is your boastfulness for?*
- Chorus (8): *An old rag is no mat*
- Soloist (9): *You take yourself to be a rack*
- Repeat Chorus (8)
- Soloist (10): *Better a mopping rag*
- Repeat Chorus (8)
- Soloist (11): *Oh, go to hell!*
- An old rag is no mat*
- You Old Rag, You Old Rag, mind your own business, stop interfering
You derive pleasure out of people's weaknesses, look at you!*
- You Old Rag, You Old Rag, mind your own business, stop interfering
You derive pleasure out of people's weaknesses, look at you!*
- Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah ...*

Conclusion

Taarab, hence its lyrics, is a complex embodiment of diversified forms and styles developing out of the need for taarab to fulfil certain roles and functions. Part of taarab's resourcefulness for construction and (re)construction of various structures are derived as mediated diversified musical lines, beats, motifs, images, tropes, icons and figures of speech, which have overtime, expanded the range of poetic repertoire through new concepts, ideas and images flowing in as part of irresistible lure of shiny and glamorous consumerist objects from outside. Taarab has therefore, an unlimited scope for change determined by 'utility impetus' and 'flavour(s)' of its audience(s). In a situation in which everything has turned into potential 'commodity', taarab too has turned into a 'commodity' – hence its existence is inherently functional and audience-oriented. As a result, stable and essentialist identities formally represented by this art-complex, are fragmented as the probing and cautious progression towards innovation and excellence is played down as moral, social and cultural taboos are broken and societal well-being is decried as the empowerment of a clique and their vested interests are safe-guarded.

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